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B A L S A M Q U A R T E R L Y

March - April - May - June - July 2019

Support · Care · Guidance

عناية · احتضان · إرشاد

## Calm after the Storm



### **Ramiz Abu Haydar**

When Ramiz Abu Haydar passed away on 8th November 2018 tributes arrived from all over the world. Wherever he went Ramiz had touched people with his kindness, his integrity, his diplomacy, his decency, and his ability to put people at their ease. One close friend talked about his 'luminous personality and contagious smile'. Another spoke of his loyalty and devotion to service.

Three years earlier, when the news that Ramiz had been diagnosed with stage 4 glioblastoma (one of the most aggressive brain tumors) shock waves reverberated from his friends across continents. Ramiz had been given 15 months to live. No one could accept it, least of all Ramiz and his wife Francoise living and working in their idyllic paradise island of Tortola. In an act of pure defiance, they were determined to stay put and fight.

That was until 7th September 2017 the day Hurricane Irma laid waste to Tortola, ripping the roof off the Abu Haydar residence and carrying in its wake most of its contents, including their beloved dog. This was a tragedy of epic proportions but for Ramiz it was also a matter of life or death. How could he receive vital hospital treatment and life saving medicines in the midst of total devastation? Medical airlift was the only answer and in a heroic effort to get him off the island, Francoise managed to negotiate his evacuation to Puerto Rico. There, Ramiz was revived with extensive rehydration treatment.

This was a short respite. With Hurricane Maria bearing down on Puerto Rico, the

Abu Haydars had but a short window to flee this second besieged island. This was the stuff of disaster movies. Exhausted and depleted the couple finally made landfall in Lebanon. Returning to Beirut under these circumstances presented a myriad of challenges. Francoise immediately set to work securing vital medicines and treatment for Ramiz.

First port of call was oncologist Dr. Ziad Salem who assessed Ramiz and arranged treatment. The next call went out to Balsam. "Dr. Hibah Osman came to see us and then liaised with Dr. Salem," says Francoise. "Between them they secured drugs and equipment for Ramiz. The two doctors remained in regular touch and together agreed to suspend the chemotherapy, which we all agreed was no longer effective. Dr. Salem was so supportive and with Balsam I got the best help I could have wished for. Any time I called them, they were there. Ramiz loved Hibah and when I heard she was leaving I wondered what we were going to do; but she assured me it would not make any difference. She brought Dr. Yamout to meet us and I saw she had the same gentle way of communicating, the same approach towards the patient and the carer, which is very important."

Francoise worked closely with the Balsam team, reporting on twice daily sugar level tests and other medical issues. With regular blood tests and careful monitoring Ramiz remained stable for 18 months. "If ever I needed something," Francoise says, "Balsam would be here in as little as 10 minutes. So supporting, so caring."

As the main carer Francoise was exhausted and in pain. Shockingly she too was diagnosed with cancer and would ultimately need an operation to remove her kidney. Support from the Balsam team was crucial in helping her to cope and she remembers with gratitude her sessions with Balsam social worker Hiba Makke.

"When the end came they were here constantly," Francoise says. "I could see Ramiz was failing and Dr. Yamout came immediately and put him on an iv and oxygen. Nurse Alia taught me how to work the oxygen, and what else to do. She was such

a support, so loving. But they made it clear that this was going to be the end”.

Ramiz had been given 15 months to live. He lasted 40. Except during her hospital treatment Francoise had remained constantly by his side. In his dying days he spent valuable time with family and friends. Ramiz was laid to rest in Hammana, the town with which the name Abu Haydar is synonymous. He is sadly missed.



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# M Y B A L S A M

## Onwards and upwards



### **Roula Doughan, Operations Manager**

Roula Doughan joined Balsam in 2016 initially as a part-timer managing human resources. Anxious to take a position that facilitated her work/life balance as the busy mother of school aged children, she took the job with some trepidation. Like everyone else in the Balsam 'family', Roula soon became wedded to the team. But when the time came to recruit an Operations Manager it never occurred to her to apply for the job. It was Balsam founder, Dr. Hibah Osman, who persuaded Roula to take up the challenge.

Sitting in the quiet Balsam office at the end of the working day, Roula reflects on the way Balsam has affected her life and work. "I grew into it gradually," she says. "In the beginning I was never sure how to fulfill my role because it was quite open-ended, and it morphed into all aspects of Balsam. Then when it was clear that we needed to recruit an operations manager, it was Dr. Osman, not me, who saw my potential. I was not convinced but when she decided to move to the States, I almost felt it was my duty! Now I know it is exactly what I always wanted."

Four years down the line her eyes shine when she talks about Balsam's impact. "I love the difference we make in people's lives," she says. "We used to have feedback from the patients and their families but it was only after I started calling donors to thank them that I really learned about our wider impact and what Balsam means to people."

As Operations Manager Roula has to be an efficient multi-tasker. On the one

hand she takes care of the daily running of the Balsam team, its nurses and admin staff; liaising with the medical doctors, arranging the nursing schedules, and oftentimes fielding emergency calls. "I run the team on an emotional rather than an administrative level," she explains. "They have a lot of day to day stress: negotiating the traffic, running late for appointments, and then responding to the needs of the patients. It is pretty much like managing a family. They have become my family, and so it comes naturally. Working in an NGO is different from in a commercial setting. There is no competition, and we help each other. For example, the other day we had an emergency call and all the nurses were already on their rounds. I sent out a message to ask who could make it to go see the patient, and all three practically arrived at the same time!"

On the other hand Roula is responsible for fundraising and events. "The highlight of my life," she says – with a huge smile – "are the two big Balsam fundraising events I organized - one two years ago, and one this summer. It's an enormous task and I always worry, not only that they succeed but also that they portray the real identity and spirit of Balsam. And we were able to do that. People have told us that our events were simple, elegant and warm, just like Balsam. It gives you a nice feeling."

Embarking on her fourth year at Balsam Roula has set herself fresh targets including identifying new supporters and new fundraising strategies. "Before, we relied on donations and our big events but we really must be more creative in reaching out to people," she says. "In the absence of the state, the country is surviving thanks to NGOs and everyone of us is pursuing whatever funds we can find. Our story is a particularly hard sell except to people who have some experience of palliative care. So I am keen to broaden our reach through more accessible, participatory events."

So what happened to the work/life balance she was so concerned about? "Oh that!" she says with a laugh. "It's always hectic. But my kids are older now and they are proud of what we do here. So is my husband – who is a doctor. He really understands and appreciates Balsam. My sister jokes that she doesn't want to spend time with me because all I talk about is Balsam. Even Dr. Osman – who I talk to often – jokes with me about whether I am on to my next project yet."

Balsam has simply become part of me!"

It seems clear that Balsam and Roula are destined to grow together for more years to come. But at the end of the day what does she find especially satisfying about her work? "I have a dual sense of satisfaction," she says. "One is the positive feedback we get as a team. The other is the way we have grown as a team. When Dr. Osman moved to the US there was a sense of panic. How would we survive without her? Then the whole team pulled together as if to prove to her and to the community that Balsam could survive and thrive. Balsam began with three people. Now we are 16 and we are stronger than ever."



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## R E C E N T L Y



### **Happy Nurses' Day – May 9th**

Nurses' Week was the perfect opportunity to take the time to recognize our wonderful nurses and tell them how much we appreciate the care they provide to our patients and their families every day of the year! Balsam's work relies heavily on the dedication and professionalism of its nurses; we wish them well every day of the year but most especially on Nurses' Day.

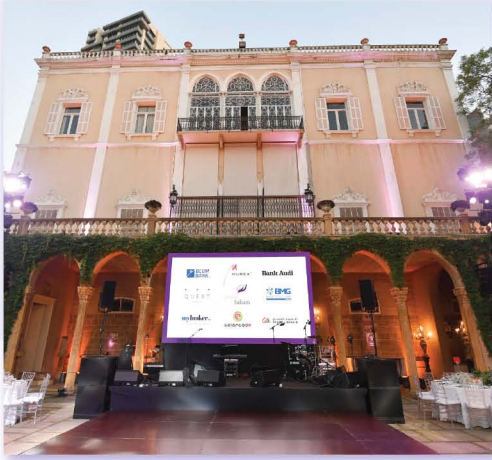


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### **Magical Evening – July 4th**

Balsam's fundraising gala was held on a warm summer evening in the Sursock Palace gardens. Hundreds of candles gave the gardens a magical feeling as guests mingled together for drinks before settling down to an evening of music and good food.



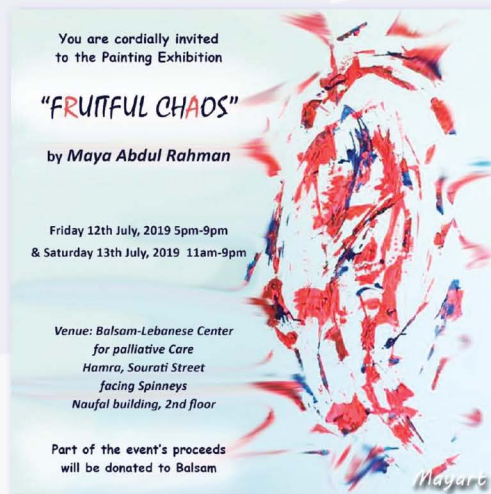


Operations Director Roula Doughan welcomed everybody and spoke about Balsam's impact; Executive Director Dr. Salah Zeineldine spoke about Balsam's accomplishments in the past year; and Balsam Founder Hibah Osman, visiting from the US for the occasion, made an emotional speech about Balsam's unique special qualities of care and compassion. This was a celebration of the support and solace

Balsam offers its patients and families. It was a beautiful evening attended by more than 435 guests.

The evening would not have been possible without the generous and continuous support Balsam receives from each and every person and organization that believes in its cause. We would like to thank our sponsors for their valuable contribution towards our work: Beirut Municipality, BLOM Bank, Murex, Bank Audi, Credit Libanais, Quest, My Broker Inc., Bikhazi Medical Group and Colorcode. Another big thank you goes to everyone who supported with by attending and all those who donated the tombola prizes.





### **Fruitful Exhibition**

On July 12&13 the Balsam offices served as an art gallery hosting a painting exhibition – “Fruitful Chaos” by team nurse Maya Abdul Rahman. Friends and art lovers mingled and enjoyed Maya’s art work. Part of the proceeds from the exhibition were donated to Balsam.

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### **Training and building skills**

Balsam Palliative Care Physician Dr. Joe Khoury is having an especially busy time with lots of activities beyond his normal Balsam brief.

November-December 2018 saw him visiting Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida, for an observership in the Pain Clinic and Pain Rehabilitation Center, and in the Palliative Care Department. This was followed by a trip to the Institut Curie in Paris in June 2019, where Dr. Khoury had been invited to lead a full-day seminar organized jointly by the Palliative Care and the Hemo-oncology Departments of the Hospital. The main themes were breaking bad news and healthcare workers burnout.

July saw Dr. Khoury heading back to the United States where he will remain until November for more training in both adult and pediatric Palliative Care. He began his trip with an observership in Pediatric Palliative Care in the Nationwide Children’s Hospital – the second largest children’s hospital in the USA – in Columbus Ohio. This was followed by research and preceptorship at the Mayo Clinic along with further training and a diploma in Pediatric Palliative Care. Dr Khoury received an International scholarship to register for and attend conferences in Minneapolis, Minnesota in October.



Balsam is proud of Dr. Khoury's commitment to growth and excellence and we look forward to welcoming him home and back to work in November.

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B A L S A M Q U A R T E R L Y

Thank you

